

Concerning the Savages Called Caribs

1. Religion

26 It is not possible to state the true number of the Caribs on Martinique, because they are continually and actively visiting and passing among those of Dominica and the other islands. Sometimes there are many Caribs here and sometimes fewer. It is true that fear and distrust of the French has caused many of them to leave this island, although we are not at war with them (unlike the French of Guadeloupe). No religion is recognized among them. Like the 115 Canadian Indians they have some recognition of the immortality of the soul, because for a few days they give to the souls of the dead clothes, food, and small belongings for their use. I believe that they do not trouble themselves with knowing what becomes of these souls; at least we have never been able to draw this information out of them. Possibly we should learn more if we were to live among them or they among us. At the present time they are greatly separated from us by inaccessible hills, so that we see them rarely and only when they come by sea to trade with the French.

776 They know by experience, at their cost, that there are spirits, and also the devil whom they call maboya, who sometimes beats them to death. The devil is not strong among them while they are with the French, but when they return they are cruelly tormented as punishment by the devil because of their visit. They also admit that the [789] sign of the cross is able to ward off the maboya. Most of them have an opening in their houses through which they say he enters and leaves. They do not render him any honor that I know, nor offer him sacrifice. They also recognize a god which they call chemin who does not treat them any better than the maboya does. It is necessary that someone [797] among them have a special communication with this spirit because he predicts future events which they can only learn through him. For example, they day before we arrived an old Carib woman told a Frenchman that a great French ship would arrive the next day. What she said was true.

779 They say that there is a serpent in Dominica which has the power 825 of making itself large or small and that it has a ruby or gem of the same luster in the middle of its forehead. It takes this gem off when